

The Girls by elizaleigh1

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Friendship, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Max M.

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-23 18:36:19

Updated: 2017-12-23 18:36:19

Packaged: 2019-12-17 03:16:08

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,960

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: It takes Max a while to win Eleven over. But the girls stick together, no matter what.

The Girls

When Max first sees it – the way Eleven's eyes expand when she looks at Mike, the trepidation that comes whenever Hopper says that it's time for the party to leave, the way her hands rest on Mike's as they say goodbye after goodbye – she thinks it must be jealousy. So, two weeks after El's closed the gate and life has gone (somewhat) back to normal, she packs up her pride and skates to the cabin she and her friends (her friends!) are typically only allowed in once a week.

The door doesn't open immediately, even with the secret knock. Max is sure that Eleven can't have been expecting anyone, and Hopper is never home from the station before six. Max sighs. It's time to wait.

After a few minutes, she becomes impatient. She can hear the soaps through the door, for goodness sake. Max knows the knock, and she knows that Eleven has found her. So why won't the girl just let her in?

Rolling her eyes (almost unintentionally) and leaning against the door, Max takes a deep breath and musters up the courage to say, "Eleven? Can I talk to you?"

Nothing.

"Eleven? Mike told me about what happened at school. I know you saw me talking to him. But I don't want to take him away from you." She snorts inwardly at the thought. "He still just tolerates me, not like the other guys," she adds as an afterthought. "Eleven?" By the end of her speech, Max can hardly hear her own thoughts, the TV's become so loud.

Nothing.

This is ridiculous.

"Eleven?" Max shouts, now banging on the door. "Eleven, I know you know it's me, just open the fucking door – "

And suddenly, it does.

Eleven stands in the doorway, hair askew, blood dripping from her nose. "Not Eleven," she says shortly, then closes the door once again.

It's a process, Lucas tries to explain to her. El isn't good with new people. Hell, she threw Lucas into a wall within the first three days of knowing him. Besides, Mike had eased off her case. Will was more than excited to welcome Max to the party, now that she'd actually spent some time with him, not his Mind-Flayer-possessed inner demon. Just give El time.

But Max isn't good at time, and she isn't good at being disliked, no matter what her tough exterior might suggest. And even if she was, Max desperately wants to be El's friend. The girl is a freaking superhero, after all – and Max could use a girlfriend in Hawkins.

The party trips to the cabin after Max's rouge visitation are colder, less inviting. Oftentimes, Hopper will come to the Byers house only to announce that El isn't feeling well, and could just Mike come say hi please. And eventually, Max is forced to head on home, to Billy and Neil and her mom and the screams and claps of anger that have become a fifth family member in the house.

The next time Max is able to catch El alone is at the Snowball. Though she never wants *Every Breath You Take* to end, she's hot off her first kiss and learning that the boy she likes might just like her back, and with the peppy beat of a new dance song she decides she'll never have the same courage she has now.

Mike and El are still swaying in the distance, even though the slow dance has passed. Without thinking, she strides up, says, "Sorry, lovebirds, but me and El need some girl time," and drags El to the middle of the dance floor.

When Max finally looks up, the glare from El's eyes are enough to make her want to melt into a puddle of goo. They stand for a moment, awkwardly, El as rigid as a board. Finally, Max starts: "I'm sorry for yelling at you."

Nothing. Then – "Sorry. For the door."

"Not a big deal. I shouldn't have been mad. It was stupid of me."

El's lips curve up at Max's words. *Stupid*. For the first time, both the girls start to think maybe it's true.

"Not yelling," El says quietly.

"What?"

"It wasn't the yelling," she corrects. "Eleven."

And Max gets it.

Not quite sure what to say, not quite sure if there's anything to say, Max decides to pull (what she'll laughably call later) a Lucas: "I love this song," she exclaims, maybe too optimistically. "Dance with me!"

El reaches out her arms, but Max is already jumping around, hair flailing. "It's fun to dance with boys," she exclaims, "But sometimes it's fun to let go, too."

By March, Hopper decides that visits can happen more than once a week, and without his supervision. Whether El's been throwing tantrums or Hopper just needs a freaking nap, no one seems to care. El can't go to them, but the party can come to her.

Sometimes Steve drives them, sometimes they bike. (And while Max would rather die than admit it, she really enjoys riding on the back of Lucas' bike.) Sometimes, when Hopper's had enough of the station, he'll pick them up from the Byers'. It doesn't matter.

To El, of course, this feels like the ultimate freedom. As the weather gets warmer, Hopper even allows the party to venture into Mirkwood – just stick together, stay hidden, and *don't be stupid*.

This is where they find themselves on the first warm day of the season: kicking around the last inches of snow, building pathetic snowmen and debating over whose is the best (Will's, of course, but El has the advantage of getting extra snow from the higher up trees and Lucas and Max come in second through their sheer stubbornness).

Then there's a crack. And –

Nothing.

"Maybe we should head back, guys," Will suggests.

"It's fine," Dustin replies quickly, "Besides, I want to spend more time with this handsome man." He steps away from his snowman to show a lean, melting figure with a Steve Harrington haircut.

"Yeah, you want to spend more time with your boyfriend Steve," Lucas teases.

"Shut up, you dipshit," Dustin mutters, making the others screech with laughter. Even El is giggling.

Another branch snaps nearby, wiping the smile almost instantly off of El's face.

Now Mike chimes in. "We're not far from the cabin, we can always come back later..." The party nods. Shoes are tied and backpacks packed when Max notices a flash of red hair and a whiff of tobacco. "Wait," she says, then shakes her head. "You guys go. I'll meet you."

Only Lucas hesitates. "Is it – "

"Yes, stalker!" she says, exasperated. "Now, go!"

Luckily, the party has managed to duck behind a log by the time Billy reaches Max in the clearing. "Well, well, well," he says, ambling over to her with a nod of his head and a roll of his eyes. "What's my little sister doing in the woods, all by herself?"

"None of your business, douchebag."

"Well, if I'm supposed to be babysitting you, Maxie, I think it is."

"Go away, Billy."

"You out here with that party of yours? The zombie, the baby, the dirtwad..."

"Don't fucking talk about them like that!" Max steps closer, her face dangerously red, looking as though she's about one comment away from stabbing another syringe into Billy's neck.

"You hang out with mini-Nancy Wheeler too, don't you?" he muses, unfazed. "That weirdo emo kid... Dad and Susan are worried about what will happen to you if you spend too much time with this crowd, Maxie..."

Something snaps, and before she knows it, Max is throwing punches above her head while Billy wrestles her to the ground, chuckling, effortlessly, as Max screams, angrier than she's been in a long time, knowing she'll lose but knowing that there's no fucking way in hell she'd let Billy get away with insulting her friends, the sweetest, funniest, admittedly weirdest kids she's ever known, who make her feel like she has a family when the one she's got acts, well, like this, and –

The pressure is gone.

Nothing.

Dazed, Max looks up. Billy is knocked against a tree some ten feet away. Behind her, El stands in front of the party, one hand reaching out, the other wrapped around Mike, who's watching her as though there's no one else around them. Max stands up, brushes herself off. El wipes her nose.

She ventures a smile.

"That was insane," Max cries, half laughing, walking towards the group. "El, I – " But as Max goes to give her a hug, she feels a slight force pushing her away, almost a bubble around the girl.

She gets the message.

Not yet.

Max's first sleepover is anything but fun.

It came about accidentally, when Neil took it one step to far and

yelled so loud the windows might as well have exploded and the neighbors called the cops and next thing Max knew, her mom was in the hospital, Billy was gone, Neil was in handcuffs, and Max was on her way to the cabin.

Hopper explains that he's signaled to El that Max is coming, but apologizes because he has to deal with her stupid stepfather, and can't be there to mediate.

Max is on her own, and there's only so many hours of soap operas Max can stand before she explodes.

"Why don't you talk to me?" she finally cries.

El turns to her, eyebrows raised.

"I thought it was because of Mike, and I get it, but you know I like Lucas, and I thought that was done. And then I just thought that you were weird around new people, but it's been months, and it's just – it's just – " Tears are threatening to fall, and even though she knows El wouldn't judge, she refuses to show weakness, especially when she's laying her soul on the table. "The boys make it look so easy, being your friend. And I know I came out of nowhere, but I helped fight the Mind-Flayer, too, and I know everything, and I tried so hard, I tried so fucking hard – " Somewhere along the way, Max isn't sure when, tears hit the sofa, and El watches them fall. "And my family is a fucking mess, and Neil's going to jail and I know, I just know that when Mom wakes up she'll say he never hurt her, even though he fucking did, and Billy will keep doing what he always does, and nothing will change, and I still won't have anyone to talk to, because I love the boys but they're boys, and they get weird about stuff, and I just want – I just want..."

When Max looks up, she realizes El has moved closer.

"Papa hurt Mama," she says simply, voice trembling.

"What?" Max blubbers.

"I understand." El replies.

"Oh. Um..." Max hastily wipes her tears and goes to stand up,

embarrassed at her outburst and embarrassed that El doesn't seem to care. "I should get ready for bed, I'm going to have to deal with my mom tomorrow, and – "

"Max?"

"Yeah?"

"I need a friend too."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

When she looks back, El's arms are out in an odd, bent position. Max raises an eyebrow. "Hug."

Max's tears threaten to fall once again. But this time, she says nothing.